

What's in a Name? by ZJpotter

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Summary:

For a minute there's silence. The noise from the TV fills his ears competing with the beating of his heart. El is staring straight at him, adoption paper clutched in her hands, eyes wet with tears. She's not saying a word, just staring with her wide eyes and she look like she might start crying.

That went well.

Takes place during the One Month Later of "The Gate".

What's in a Name?

The door opens and Hopper steps inside, plastic bags swinging by his legs. He can make out the curls of Eleven's hair sticking out from behind the couch. Soap operas. Right where he left her this morning.

"How was work?" she asks.

"I didn't go to work today."

He turns to slide the lock into place, but it slides by itself. El hasn't turned around yet. Hopper places the bags on the table and heads into the kitchen.

"I got you something."

El gets up off the couch at that, making her way over to the table with her bear tucked under her arm. She's wearing one of his shirts again. It's not like she doesn't have her own clothes, she just likes his.

She looks into the bags on the table, her eyes widening and mouth pulling into a smile.

"Ice cream!"

Hopper chuckles and brings over two bowls and two spoons, "I got us some new flavors to try."

El points to one of the two containers: Rocky Road. Hopper pushes the other ice cream container to the side and opens the Rocky Road. El moves closer to peer at the chocolate-marshmallow confection. He scoops some into her bowl and El looks up with a very serious expression.

"No dessert before dinner."

Now she chooses to listen to him.

"Yeah, well, the rule is lifted today," he says and then points a finger at her, "Only for today."

He knows she won't listen to him. Tomorrow evening he'll come home to find El eating a bowl of ice cream, whatever food he told her to eat discarded on the counter.

He knows she'll get off with a stern reminder to eat her dinner first and they'll sit down and eat like they always do. He can't bring himself to do more than that.

El sits down and shoves the spoon into her mouth which is already covered in a glob of ice cream. She closes her eyes and gives a little hum.

"Good?" Hopper asks sitting down with his own bowl. (Diets are for another day).

"Cold," she says, "Sticky. Good."

They eat in silence for a while and when El is halfway done with her first serving, Hopper remembers why he brought the ice cream in the first place.

The town is buzzing with the news that their sleepy little Hawkins is not so quiet. People went missing and they had gotten over it fairly quickly. Now the trusted Department of Energy had inadvertently killed one of Hawkins very own teenagers. Hopper knows that's not the true story but it still brings a smile to his face seeing the creepy old building crumple. Its been one whole month since El closed the gate and nearly a whole year since he found her frozen and alone in the woods. She was smaller then and scared, but she put her trust in his hands and some how he earned her friendship.

He never expected her to have him wrapped around her finger,

"I spoke to Dr.Owens today," Hopper says. "The doctor from the lab, the one with the leg."

El nods to show that she's listening. Hopper doesn't continue and the conversation hangs in the air like icicles on a window. He wants to continue, hates suspense, but he can't.

There's no room for beating around the bush in his line of work. He wants it straight forward-rip the bandage straight off. Its better to get

the facts that way so he can make the decision on what to do next. Absolutely no sentimentality.

El's eyebrows pinch together in slight concern as she reaches to refill her bowl with ice cream.

Hopper crosses his elbows on the table and leans forward and forces himself to speak.

"We've been trying to work something out, the doc and I. He intends to get you somewhat of a normal life, so you can go to school and hang out with those friends of yours. There were issues-legal issues since your records are kind of-"

El stares at him and Hopper realizes she has no clue what he's saying. El is a teenage girl, not one of the people that stop by the station. He tries again.

"I got you this," he says and pulls out a little folder from the bag that held the ice cream.

El takes it warily, opening the little flap and pulling out the slip of paper inside. Hopper watches her look at it; he's nervous even if he won't admit it to himself. He hasn't been this nervous since the day Sara was born. Then he had been wondering how he could possibly be a father to the little baby that was going to be born in hopefully a few minutes. He had been wondering what she would look like and even if she would like him. Looking back on it now, he thinks he was being irrational. Sara had looked like her mother and had loved him to pieces. She had been the sweetest thing he'd ever seen. His girl.

"Jane Hopper."

"Yeah."

El flips the paper over and when she finds nothing on the other side she flips it back over again. She hands the paper back over to him.

Hopper can't help but chuckle.

"This isn't mine," she says, the paper still out between them.

"I guess it isn't kid."

"Who's Jane Hopper?"

"Well about-"

"Story?" El sits up straighter in her chair.

Her eyes light up the way they always do when he grabs a book for them to read. She likes the stories and the adventures even if she can't always understand what he's saying.

"A year ago, I found this girl in the woods. She was cold and starving and alone and wearing my old shirt I had forgotten I had given to her. I took her home, gave her a place to stay and some food to eat. I had intended it to be a safe house, a place to warm up, something so that the girl wouldn't have to fend for herself. So I said, hey let the girl stay for a couple of days. Then it changed to weeks. Then to months. Then to nearly a whole year. The girl had clothes now, books, blankets, things to call her own. Yet she was unhappy. This girl and I....we fought more than I'd like to admit. I wanted her safe, she wanted to go out-to know when she could go out. So she left. She left and I didn't know where she went. I didn't know if she was okay or if she was hurt or if she'd end up like we might have if we didn't get out of that mess in that place."

Hopper looks down for a moment. He may not be good at sentimentality but he can certainly have his moments. Hopper sighs and looks back up to meet El's teary eyes.

"I do know that I ended up caring a heck of a lot more than I intended to. Wrapped herself around my finger is what she did. I don't want her back out there, unsafe and alone because she isn't. She isn't alone. She's got me looking out for her whether she likes it or not. So today, I'm giving that girl a choice. A choice to live here with her own clothes, her own books, and her own blankets. A choice to accept my question. Does she want to be Jane Hopper? Does she want to be my daughter?"

For a minute there's silence. The noise from the TV fills his ears competing with the beating of his heart. El is staring straight at him,

adoption paper clutched in her hands, eyes wet with tears. She's not saying a word, just staring with her wide eyes and she look like she might start crying.

That went well.

Hopper gives another sigh and curls on hand around his ice cream bowl, "I should wash these up."

He stands up and takes both of their bowls. Some of El's melted ice cream drips over the side of her bowl and onto his hand.

"Yes."

It's so quiet he almost doesn't hear it ,but by this point his ears have been trained to hear El.

"What was that kid?"

"Yes," El looks up and Hopper finds she is most definitely crying, "Jane Hopper."

All of a sudden her chair is empty and the wind is knocked out of him by a curly haired telekinetic. His curly haired telekinetic. El-Jane's arms wrap around him, face buried in the fabric of his shirt. Hopper wraps an arm around her, keeping her close.

"Dad."

It takes a moment for him to realize that she means him. He doesn't think he will ever get used to it.

It's a happy moment; he realizes how few of those there had been lately. It's just the two of them alone in the cabin but there's no fighting this time. Just El-Jane nuzzling into his stomach and rocky road ice cream melting over his fingers. That's when he realizes he has to end the nice moment.

He slowly moves the arm that's around his daughter (what a weird thought) and places a hand on her shoulder. Jane steps away and looks at him, puzzled.

"You have to lay low for a bit. No going out and having adventures for a while."

"No."

"Hey-"

"No. I want-I want-"

Jane folds her arms over her chest, eyes shining with frustrated tears. Hopper crouches down to her level, tilts her chin so she looks at him. Her gaze is so stubborn he almost wants to laugh.

"I know. It's not fair, but this is so you can be safe. Things aren't safe right now. Not stupid remember?"

"When is 'safe'?"

"One year. That's three hundred and sixty five days."

Jane hums and then nods slowly. She doesn't make him promise. It's a little unnerving for she lives on promises and she doesn't make him promise but Hopper lets the worry pass for now.

"One more thing," he straightens up to his full height, "What was that thing the Wheeler kid asked you to? The...the Ice Dance?"

"Snow Ball."

"Yeah that. I asked the Doc. You can go."

Jane's eyes light up like the Christmas lights already hanging in store windows. She dances around the living room, twirling her stuffed bear around with her.

Apparently, the kid had asked her a year ago before she had disappeared. So he had asked, again. He had been nervous yet determined when he asked Hopper if he could take her. Hopper had given the kid an extra hard time just because he could. Not that he doesn't trust the kid. Jane trusts him with her life, someone needs to be more guarded.

"We gotta tell Mike!" Jane shouts, "Gotta tell Mike! I can go!"

"Okay how about you go get ready for bed first? Then we can talk about telling Mike."

Jane darts off.

"Brush your teeth!" Hopper calls after her although he doubts she heard.

He shakes his head as he makes his way to the kitchen. Here he is, Chief of police, living in a secluded cabin in the woods, calling after a girl to brush her teeth. Out of all the things he had seen himself doing after last year, this is not one of them.

He has a daughter.

He pauses, letting that run through his mind.

Someone tell him what he should do next.

Author's Note:

I have no idea how adoption actually works. Oh well. Thanks for reading! I hope you enjoyed it. I'm bringing some of the party back for the next one!